

# Necessary elements for building and maintaining church unity.

## SCRIPTURE TEXT: PHILIPPIANS 2:1-4 (ESV)

*<sup>1</sup> So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, <sup>2</sup> complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. <sup>3</sup> Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. <sup>4</sup> Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.*

The first half of Philippians 2 is really a list describing how Christians should act toward one another. Too often, we jump to the middle of the list and go straight to Christ's example of humility. We should always consider Christ's example for our lives, but that is only half of this list. The entire list points back to Philippians 1:27 - "Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so I may hear that you are standing firm in one faith spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel.

Two weeks ago, we learned if Christians would consider and apply the verses at the end of chapter 1, the kingdom of God will expand. In other words, if we did what we were supposed to do and if we acted a little excited about what we represented, the kingdom of God would expand and there might not be enough churches to hold the new converts.

Paul used Philippians 2 to push them toward deeper church unity. Every church needs improvement in this area. A church could have twenty people that consisted of one extended family and they would still have unity issues.

Paul isn't teaching on doctrine or theology, although there is good theology in our text. Rather, his language indicates he addresses standards, preferences and interests that grew from personal choice.

Basically, Paul tells the Philippian church they will make his day if they work toward getting on the same page and staying there. When something has grown from personal preference and takes center stage in a church, there will be problems. The sin of indifference (*lack of interest, concern, or sympathy*) will breakout and birth disunity. when God's Word is not the starting point for every conversation, disunity will sneak into a church very quickly.

## The First Element For Building and Maintaining Church unity is **Biblical Motivation** – verse 1

Paul gives four “if” statements in verse 1

- ...if there is encouragement in Christ
  - This encouragement is described as one who offers comfort, counsel or exhortation to another brother or sister in Christ.
  - It’s a shame that pastors have to remind congregations to keep encouragement appropriate. Men encourage other men. Women encourage other women.
  - The most powerful encouragement comes directly from the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. We are to compliment the Holy Spirit’s work of encouragement to our fellow believer.
  - Offering encouragement to another believer should be one of our faithful responses to the union we have with Christ.
  
- ...if there is any comfort from love
  - Comfort looks similar to encouragement, but is needed when a believer’s circumstances just went south. A bad medical report. A death in the family. A family emergency. Stress caused from the behavior of a child. Marital problems. Financial hardships. The list goes on...
  - Comfort from love tells another Christian he/she is not alone and that you are genuinely concerned about their current struggle to get through life.
  
- ...if there is any participation with the Spirit
  - Fellow Christian, we ought to get this one right. Church unity requires intimacy with God on an individual level and a corporate level.
  - 1 Corinthians 6:19 says our bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is with us at every moment of our life. The Holy Spirit doesn’t abandon a temple that he sanctified. Just like a child’s bedroom is still his bedroom, whether it is clean or dirty; a dirty temple is still a temple.
  - The deepest church unity comes when the body of Christ rightly participates with the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit sets the course. The Holy Spirit gives the power. The Holy Spirit bestows gifts. The Holy Spirit grows the fruit. As His temple, it is the believer’s job to submit to the course.
  
- ...if there is any affection and compassion.
  - Believers have an opportunity to re-present Jesus by tenderly caring for the weak and oppressed. James 1:27 says that pure religion is exhibited in the person who cares for widows and orphans and keeps oneself unstained from the world.

- We are commanded again and again to be compassionate followers of Jesus. Some people have certain spiritual gifts that allow compassion to flow more easily, but affection and compassion are not determined by gifts.
- Colossians 3:12-13 says, “Put on then, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience,<sup>13</sup> bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.”

We should be willing to grow in these Biblical motivations as a response for what the Lord has given to us.

## The Second Element For Building and Maintaining Church unity is Like-Mindedness – verse 2

There are three phrases in verse 2 that speak to like-mindedness in a church.

**Be of the same mind** simply means “to think the same thing and go in the same direction”. On a theological level, this concept should easily be grasped. If you cannot fully embrace the doctrinal statement of a church, you shouldn’t make a long-term commitment to that church. We probably understand that, but what should you do when you don’t agree with the methods of a church? The text says, “be of the same mind”, which means that you actively work to achieve common understanding and agreement. In other words, get on the same page. If you can’t get on the same page, you will break church unity.

**Having the same love** is to love the body of Christ equally and to treat them the same. There are several words used for love in the New Testament. This type of love is agape. It has nothing to do with attraction or preference, but it is an intentional choice to seek the welfare of another person. We should remember that Philippians was written to Christians. Paul will address our love for unbelievers later in the book, but here he tells us to make sure we love the body of Christ well.

1 John 3:15 says, “Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.”

The verse might seem harsh, but how we offer equal love to the body of Christ gives evidence of our salvation. In contrast, a consistent lack of love exposes that one might not be saved.

As the world becomes more hostile toward Christians, we need to learn to love our own team well. If we choose not to show love to those who presumably think like us, how will we ever love those who do not think like us?

**Be in full accord and of one mind.** You can write Ephesians 5:20 next to this verse – “submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.”

Be on the same page and love well, but do not expect that every person will think exactly the same way you think on every matter. Be united in the Holy Spirit through your differences and remain intentional about the mission before you.

## The Third Element For Building and Maintaining Church unity is **Humility - verse 3-4**

There are two key phrases that teach about humility in verses 3-4.

**Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit.** We can easily become blind to our own selfishness, so let me point out a few aspects of selfishness. You be the judge of your own life.

- Selfishness is placing our agenda above God’s agenda and it is the root of every other sin.
- Selfishness is declaring one’s own ability to superior in promoting the cause of Christ.
- Selfishness is one person gaining from another person’s losses.
- Selfishness hurts people.

Conceit is an attempt to have all eyes on me. Nobody else gets any credit or glory, not even God.

Selfishness and conceit plagues every one of our lives.

**Let each of you look not only to his own interests.** When people look out for their own interest, they look for a way to manipulate the path. Some people don’t hide it well and you know it’s coming. Other are subtle and deceptive. The craftiness of their actions manipulate the outcome without others realizing it until it is too late. There is no room for those actions in the kingdom of God. We should call sin what it is.

In contrast, when we look for the interest of others, we give close attention and careful consideration to the words and body language of others.

Remember, Paul is addressing Christians.

## **Let's draw a few application points**

The first element for church unity is biblical motivation. Is what God says the foundation for your actions more often than not? If not, how do you need to grow in your biblical motivation?

The second element for church unity is like-mindedness. What are the areas you need to grow in your ability to love other Christians?

The third element for church unity is humility. Every one of us needs to grow in humility. Selfishness is the number one sin in our lives. For this application point, I want to challenge you to get alone throughout the week and examine your level of humility and write down specific points of growth you need to reach.